

# Wilmette Pet Center

*"the place for people who love pets"*

## Common Fish Keeping Myths

There are many common misconceptions and myths floating around about fish keeping and aquarium care, so we're going to take a moment to address a few of the ones we frequently hear:

### **I can put several fish in a small two gallon bowl.**

This mostly depends on the fish. With fish tanks, there is something we call the bio load - the number of fish you can have based on the size of the tank and the size of the fish. The general rule of thumb is one inch of fish per gallon. There are some ways to fudge this rule: adding a filter (or a more powerful filter) and more frequent water changes can allow you to keep a few more fish. Some of the cleaner and hardier species of fish can be in larger groups., and it all depends on the amount of work you want to put into your tank.

### **Fish only grow to the size of their tank.**

There are some species that do suffer from "stunting" and stay small, but this is usually caused by ammonia poisoning, not the tank size. And while fish kept in this toxic environment will survive, it's for a limited time, and they won't thrive. Most species will grow to their adult sizes, regardless of the size of their homes.



### **Bottom feeders and algae eaters will help keep my tank clean.**



This is the most common one we hear, and it's definitely not true. Most bottom feeders are members of the catfish family. These have mouths that are turned down for feeding on invertebrates and small fish. It is neither healthy nor desirable for them to exist solely on other fish's waste and leavings. They need a diet that is appropriate for them, such as sinking shrimp pellets.

Algae eaters do remove some of the algae in the tank, but don't actually change the water quality. If it's eating, it's also pooping. Algae results from too much energy in the tank, be it electrical energy from too much light or chemical energy from too much food (and waste). Scraping the algae to remove the spores, adding appropriate plants, keeping the lights on less, decreasing your feeding, and more frequent water changes are going to do a better job of reducing your algae. If you do have an algae eater, that means that you should keep some algae for them to munch on.

### **I need to scrub my tank out, clean the gravel, and use new water to keep a healthy tank.**

Definitely not true. The gravel in the tank provides a huge surface area for the beneficial bacteria that do help at reducing ammonia and nitrites. Cleaning it completely destroys this ecosystem, causing a spike in the ammonia in the tank. It is necessary to stir your gravel up when doing a water change, to help remove debris and detritus that can begin to cause pockets of anaerobic bacteria and a buildup of dihydrogen sulfide.

## Let your water sit out for a day before adding it to the tank.

This is a rather old fashioned procedure. We don't seem to like little swimming squiggly things in our tap water, so we add chlorine to keep the water clean. While chlorine does evaporate, these days water treatment plants add so much to our tap water that it would take a week or more for it all to leave the water. Most municipalities also add chloramines, which never evaporate.



So what do we do? We use tap water conditioner, which works instantly to neutralize these chemicals and preserves your ecosystem (all the beneficial bacteria that help reduce ammonia and nitrites. See more on our care sheet, [The Nitrogen Cycle.](#))

## Tiny, like 2, 3, or 5 gallon fish tanks make good beginner tanks

Small tanks are actually harder to take care of. There is a small volume of water, and ammonia and other problems can build up quickly, causing deaths before you can catch them. Cleaning a larger tank, 10 or 20 gallons, does not take much more time than cleaning a bowl, and all that water gives you time to prevent sudden changes in water quality. We also find that people want a lot of fish, frequently leading to overstocked tanks, leading to excessive ammonia and dead fish. A larger tank gives you room for so many more fish and a lot more variety.

## Goldfish are short lived fish/Goldfish are the best fish for bowls.

Goldfish can actually live quite a long time: the oldest recorded captive goldfish Goldie died at the age of 45. Most people don't realize their need for very clean water, and don't do the necessary water changes, leading to stress from ammonia poisoning and eventually death. While the water change should take no more than two or three minutes, it is very important to do it every day to deal with their waste. A simple bubble filter, such as the Small World Filter, can help keep the tank cleaner and reduce the need for water changes.

And while goldfish can be kept in a bowl (with daily water changes), there are other fish that are easier to care for:

**Bettas:** These beautiful fish are just perfect for a small bowl. They have evolved in small, shallow, warm puddles. They have so much personality, and are very easy to take care of: Because these fish are so low energy, you only need to do weekly water changes, and feed a few pellets every day. Bettas are kept solo, as they are very territorial.



**Danios:** These little schooling fish are incredibly hardy and are great in a bowl. There are a few varieties, such as the zebra and the leopard danios, and they create a very active, lively little setup perfect for the kid's room. You can keep three in a one gallon or about 5 in a two gallon bowl. For a little more pop, consider adding in a:

**Glofish:** These are zebra danios that have been genetically modified with phosphorescent proteins in a lab. Originally created to check for pollution in streams and ponds, these hardy little fish have found a permanent niche in the aquarium hobby. Since they are a zebra danio, they'll school with them, and many people make their little school pop with one brightly colored Glofish.

**White clouds:** These are hardy little fish that come in two varieties: regular and gold. Similar to the danios, they can be kept in the same numbers in a small school.

Keeping fish is such a rich, rewarding hobby. It is peaceful, relaxing, and helps kids learn so much, and with the right knowledge, you can be very successful. We're here to help: check out our caresheets on [water changes](#), [feeding](#), and learn all about the [nitrogen cycle](#), or stop by at any time to speak with our trained staff and get all your questions answered.